

Environmentalists honoured with WESSA awards

Dr John Hanks, Ntokozo Mbuli, Franz Fuls, the Paul Roux Residents' Forum and the ROSE Foundation all received awards at a special ceremony held during the 89th Annual General Meeting of the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) at Goedgedacht Farm near Malmesbury in the Western Cape on 26 September.



Ntokozo Mbuli with WESSA Chairman Richard Lewis

The awards enable WESSA to recognise and honour individuals, corporations, organisations, and community, educational or volunteer groups that have made a significant contribution to environmental conservation or to environmental education in South Africa over a sustained period of time.

Dr Howard Hendricks, acting managing executive for Conservation Services at SANParks, provided insights into the diverse funding streams that are currently used by conservation organisations to sustain the ecosystems and built infrastructure in our protected areas. In particular he argued that we need to work wisely with government grants and ensure that these grants are used to leverage additional and more sustainable funding through tourism and other income streams.

Poverty and inequality

Dr Guy Preston, deputy director-general of Environment Programmes at the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), emphasised the importance of addressing inequality and poverty as an integral part of building sustainability, saying there can be no sustainability without addressing poverty and inequality.

He stressed that as we seek to address the threats to sustainability - such as the spread of alien invasive plants, animals and diseases - we also need to build a more equitable society, to protect and restore our ecosystems and to ensure that our economy contributes to these processes.

Tom McLaughlin, Woolworths Foods Good Business Journey manager, provided a long-term perspective on the moral responsibilities that we all have to protect the environment and to care for humanity. He described how Woolworths is working with suppliers, business partners, academics, scientists, NGOs and customers to manage their direct and indirect impact on communities and the world around them. Woolworths' goal is that by 2020 every product they sell should have at least one sustainability attribute, such as being hormone free, organically produced or produced in a socially responsible manner.

Recent innovations

Dr Jim Taylor, WESSA's director of Environmental Education, described how WESSA has been able to make substantial contributions to sustainability in South Africa and beyond, by leveraging membership involvement, a professional staff and wide-ranging partnerships. He highlighted the point that human capacity development is a major focus of WESSA's work, noting that since human actions are causing the issues the solution must be with humans.

He also spoke about recent innovations, including the development of citizen science tools that can be accessed through smartphones and can be used to assess, monitor and report on water and biodiversity challenges. These tools have placed WESSA at the forefront of sustainability work in South Africa.

Peter Templeton, director at Goedgedacht Trust, spoke about the organisation's successful Path Out of Poverty (POP) programme which involves a long-term 25 year commitment to rural community members involved in the programme, equipping them to survive in their own context as a more realistic approach to focusing on job creation.

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